EFFECTS OF SMALL GROUP READING INSTRUCTION ON READING LEVEL, READING ACHIEVEMENT SCORES, AND SELF-CONCEPT IN ELEMENTARY GRADES

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by

Marilyn Kelly Maher

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Approved by Committee:

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Chairman

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ASSOCIATE Dean of the School of Graduate Studies

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of today's major social problems is the enormous number of children who, as a result of severe reading disabilities, are unable to realize their intellectual and educational potentials. Reading failure frequently results in an impaired self-image, and many children become social and emotional casualties as a result of early defeat. Adverse emotional reactions to reading failure appear early in the elementary grades and complicate later growth in reading. The teacher must be aware of the nature of the interrelatedness of reading, the student's self-image, and academic progress during the school years.

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The hypotheses of this study are (1) to determine whether small group instruction in reading outside the classroom promotes individual reading growth; (2) to determine whether small group instruction in reading outside the classroom leads to an improved self-concept; (3) to determine whether small group instruction in reading increases the reading part of an individual's school achievement; and (4) to learn whether there is a relationship between reading growth and an improved self-concept.

Importance of the study. As the individual develops, so should his reading habits show signs of maturation and progress. To develop mature reading habits is a long range developmental and educative process that is an important part of the individual's total growth and development. Too often small group reading instruction is neglected at the elementary school level. Children are placed in a classroom containing thirty to thirty-five pupils with little regard for the child who is reading one, two or even three grades below his grade placement. Remedial reading teachers are often found at the junior high, high school, or even the college level but seldom at the elementary school level.

Reading, because of its importance in society, assumes great importance as a developmental task and failure to master it may interfere with the development of an individual's self-esteem. Poor readers have a low motivation toward academic achievement. They often cannot accept rules and will not try to adjust to them. They show other evidences of emotional instability, emotional immaturity, or lack of social confidence. Feelings of inadequacy and nervousness, or feelings of discouragement may indicate a low self-concept and result in underachieving in academic subjects. The investigator feels that failure in reading is too heavy a load for an individual to carry with him if help may be gained through small group reading instruction outside the classroom.

Teachers want to do the right thing to help the individual with his reading problem if they only have the knowledge and opportunity to work with him. Too often the teacher may have the knowledge but fail to reach the child because of an overcrowded classroom and a lack of time during the school day. Smith and Dechant summarized the relationship and the importance of reading and the self-concept:

> We wish to know how a child's personality may influence his reading and how reading failure or success may influence the development of the child's personality. The self has needs that demand satisfaction. Because reading, in our culture, is an essential developmental task, failure in reading can block the child's attempts to satisfy this need for self-esteem within the culture. Parents and teachers may compound the problem by nagging the child or by showing their worry, anger or discouragement.[1]

Limitations of the study. The major limitations of this study were (1) the small number of students, (2) measurement devices and techniques have limitations, and (3) the use of test scores from two different achievement tests.

The third grade subjects in this study had trouble understanding some statements on the "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory." Giving an added explanation to the subject was done with the hope that it would not influence his answer.

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[1]Henry P. Smith and Emerald V. Dechant, Psychology in Teaching Reading (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1961), p. 297.

Some subjects found it hard to understand they were to state only how they felt on the "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory." They often wanted to look at their fellow student and smile or nod in agreement with his feelings.

Students with low reading ability often possess a short attention span and tire easily. On occasion a student would stop in the middle of the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test" or begin to guess at each answer so he could finish his test quickly. Creating the right atmosphere in giving the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test" so that students with low reading ability would demonstrate their complete reading skills was not an easy task. Some problems such as these arose during the study, and are noted here in the hope that others may profit from recognizing them.

II. ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTS

Achievement test. An "achievement test" is designed to measure the degree to which individuals have acquired certain information or knowledge and mastered certain study skills. The "Stanford Achievement Test" for Intermediate and Primary Reading and the reading section of the "Metropolitan Achievement Test" were used in this study. The tests measured the outcome of instruction in Word Meaning and Paragraph Meaning.

The reading section of the "Iowa Test of Basic Skills" was also used in this study. The test measured the outcome of instruction in Reading Comprehension and Reading Vocabulary.

Self-Esteem inventory. The "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory" used in this study, is an instrument that intended to measure the self-esteem of the individual as seen by him. The inventory was constructed to appraise high, medium and low self-esteem.

Reading test. The "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test" was used in this study. The test measured outcomes of instruction in selected reading areas: Reading Vocabulary and Reading Comprehension at grade levels three, four and five as well as Speed and Accuracy at grade levels four and five.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The self-concept has been a concern of psychology for a number of years. Despite this, the subject remains elusive and confusing, probably because of the lack of precision in defining this concept. The lack of an acceptable definition of self-concept contributes to the lack of really effective measurement techniques.[1] Since the self-concept is an organization within the individual's perceptual or phenomenal field, it is not open to direct observation. To study the self-concept it is necessary to infer its nature from observations of the behavior of the individual.

Research has indicated relationships between self-concept indices and a number of variables believed to be fundamental to school and life adjustment. These variables include conceptions of school; social status at home and at school; emotional adjustment; mental ability; and achievement in various academic subjects.

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[1]M. D. Caplin, "Self-Concept, Level of Aspiration and Academic Achievement," Journal of Negro Education, XXXVII (Fall, 1968), 435.

I. DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-CONCEPT AS THE CHILD APPROACHES READING AGE

In our culture the young child approaches the formal project of learning to read when he is approximately six years old. He will bring all of his previous learning with him as he approaches the new challenge.

In the beginning, a child is aware only of his physical comfort and discomfort, for he lives his life largely at a biological level. However, through the close, personal relationship with his mother and, perhaps, other nurturing adults, the relevant world gradually takes shape.[1] As feelings, desires, goals, values, and ideas emerge, the behavior of the child indicates how he perceives, feels about, and thinks about his world and himself.

Before language and higher thought processes are well established, the conceptual value of self is determined.[2] The significant people in the child's environment have fulfilled his survival needs. He senses whether they can increase or decrease his sense of helplessness; whether they can promote or diminish his sense of well-being.[3]

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[1]Joseph L. Stone and Joseph Church, Childhood and Adolescence (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 456.

[2]Don E. Hamache (ed.), The Self in Growth, Teaching, and Learning (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 2.

[3]Ibid.

The individual security of the significant people raising the child and their ability to give love communicate to the youngster his worth and value as an individual. The child accepts the standards of significant adults and he does what he has to do in order to maintain the relationship.

As the child grows from infancy to toddlerhood, to pre-school and school age, he is structuring a self-image out of the day by day life he lives. Individually, each child differentiates specific and somewhat stable characteristics of himself out of a phenomenal field. The structure of the specific and stable characteristics becomes the self-image.[1] In time, the self-image is the child's guide to his behavior. He strives to maintain the image, for as long as he can function according to anticipation, he is relatively free from disturbing feelings of helplessness.[2]

Hopefully, the child approaching a beginning reading program comes with a self-image which will allow him to enter into it with eagerness and confidence. Realistically, however, there will be children in every group who will come with privations of one kind or another--some severe, some slight.

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[1]Arthur W. Combs and Donald Snygg, Individual Behavior (New York: Harper Brothers, 1949), p. 130.

[2]A. Harry Passow (ed.), Education in Depressed Areas (Teachers College, Columbia University, 1964), p. 124.

II. RELATIONSHIP OF THE SELF-CONCEPT, ACHIEVEMENT, AND READING DURING THE SCHOOL YEARS

Staines believed it was possible to teach so that, while aiming at normal results of teaching, specific changes could be made in the self-picture. One teacher studied the self-ratings of his class and tried to teach so that certain self-ratings were changed. A control class was taught by a teacher having no awareness of the self-picture as an outcome of education. He found, as a result of his study, that:

> When the significance of the figures for the various levels of the self is tested by chi-squared technique, the experimental group shows a significant decrease in "Not sure" scores for the self, ideal self and the other self. The class gained significantly in certainty about the boundaries of the self. Equally significant, and numerically much greater, is the increase in scores in the "Not sure" rating in control group. Starting with a significantly greater degree (1 per cent level) of uncertainty than the experimental group in the self and other self, after the "settling-down" period of one month, this group increased its uncertainty over its own initial score and over the experimental group in all three levels of the self.[1]

In his study Staines said, "On standardized tests in reading and number, the experimental teacher produced slightly greater mean improvement in his class."[2] He believed it is

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[1] J. W. Staines, "The Self-Picture as a Factor of the Classroom," British Journal of Educational Psychology, XXXVIII (June, 1958), 110.

[2] Ibid., p. 111.

possible for a teacher to conceive his educational goals in the wider terms of the self-picture and to secure these while attaining the necessary academic standards.

An attempt was made by Williams and Cole to discover the relationship between self-concept indices and a series of variables construed to be fundamental to school adjustment. The series of dependent variables included conceptions of school, social status at school, emotional adjustment, mental ability, reading achievement, and mathematical achievement. They reached the following conclusions:

> The analysis of the results produced few high correlations, but all were statistically significant. A correlation of .22 was obtained between the self-concept and social esteem indices. A significant correlation of .31 was obtained between self-concept and mental ability. In addition, the analysis revealed a correlation of .31 between self-concept and reading achievement, and a correlation of .33 between self-concept and mathematical achievement.[1]

Brookover, Thomas and Paterson found a significant and positive correlation between self-concept and performance in the academic role. They found self-concept positively correlated with the perceived evaluation the significant others hold of the student; however, it is a composite image rather than the image of specific others that appears to be

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[1]Robert L. Williams and Spurgeon Cole, "Self-Concept and School Adjustment," Personnel and Guidance Journal, XLVI (January, 1968), 479.

most closely correlated with the student's self-concept in specific subjects.[1]

A recent study based on data gathered from fourth, fifth and sixth grade students was completed by Campbell. He drew the following conclusions:

> There is support for the hypothesis of a positive relationship (r = .308) between "Coopersmith Self-Esteem" and Achievement ("Iowa" Composite) scores. Support was also found for the hypothesis that the relationship decreases at progressively higher grade levels, that the relationship is higher for boys than for girls, and that the mean school-related self-concept score differs in value for boys and girls, with girls obtaining higher scores.[2]

In a study using fifth- and sixth-grade children, Coopersmith found a correlation of .36 between positive self-concept and school achievement. He found that children who had high self-esteem were significantly less anxious than those with low self-esteem.[3]

Based on the reported association between poor self-concepts and reading disabilities, Wattenberg and Clifford did

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[1]Wilbur B. Brookover, Shailor Thomas, and Ann Paterson, "Self-Concept of Ability and School Achievement," Sociology of Education, XXXVII (Spring, 1964), 271-278.

[2]Paul B. Campbell, "School and Self-Concept," Educational Leadership, XXIV (March, 1967), 512.

[3]Boyd R. McCandless, Children Behavior and Development (Chicago: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1967), p. 270.

an exploratory study to determine which was the antecedent phenomenon. They found that, on the whole, the correlations between reading test scores and changes in qualified measures of self-concept were slightly inclined to be negative. In a kindergarten study two and one-half years earlier, they had found decided correlations between reading achievement and kindergarten self-concept. They have indicated, that in rank ordering, high ranks have no place to go but down and low ratings, by chance alone, would move upward. They have contended that the tendency for the negative results support the hypothesis that self-concept in kindergarten has greater influence on the development of reading skill than the negative reading experience has upon the self-concept.[1]

Bodwin studied pupils with reading disability, arithmetic disability, and with no educational disability. He found relations between immature self-concepts and reading disability giving correlations of .72 at the third grade level and .62 at the sixth grade level.[2]

Fifth grade students were used in a study by Lumphin to examine the relationships that might be obtained between

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[1]William W. Wattenberg and Clare Clifford, "Relation of Self-Concept to Beginning Achievement in Reading," Child Development, XXXV (June, 1964), 461-467.

[2]Raymond F. Bodwin, "The Relationship Between Immature Self-Concept and Certain Educational Disabilities," (dissertation, Michigan State University, 1957).

the self-concepts of a group of elementary school children and the achievement in reading. Lumphin reached the following conclusions:

> Overachievers in reading revealed significantly more positive self-concepts, revealed higher levels of adjustment, and saw themselves as liking reading. These children were viewed positively by both teachers and peers.
>
> Underachievers in reading made significantly lower scores on measures of academic achievement. They manifested a predominantly negative perception of self, a desire to be different from the self as seen, and, to a statistically significant extent, they expressed feelings of conflict more frequently. They were viewed by teachers as manifesting high problem tendency.[1]

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[1]Donavon D. Lumphin, "The Relationship of Self-Concept to Achievement in Reading," (dissertation, University of Southern California, 1959).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

I. METHODS, MATERIALS, AND GROUPS USED

Subjects in this study were students in grades three, four and five of the Westmont, Illinois, School District No. 57. The third week of October, 1969, twenty-seven of the students were given the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test" to determine the reading level of each student. These students ranged in age from seven years to eleven years. Form 1 was used for all three grade levels. The third grade students took Primary C of the test. Students in grades four and five took Survey D.

The following week the same twenty-seven students were given the "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory."

The remaining nineteen students in the study took the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test" the last week of November, 1969. The first week of December, 1969, these nineteen students were given the "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory."

Classroom teachers judged most of the students in the study as reading at least two years below grade level. They were selected as the students in their rooms to be most in need of small group reading instruction.

On the basis of an "Informal Reading Inventory," the investigator placed each student in a small group with other

children who had similar reading disabilities. Each group contained from four to six students. The students left their classrooms for forty minutes each day to participate in this small group instruction. The researcher worked with children in three different schools. This caused each group of children to receive reading instruction for twelve weeks and then remain without small group instruction for six weeks.

The forty minute reading period was usually divided into two sessions. During the first session the investigator attempted to work on the specific problems of each student. Board work, games, drill and teacher prepared worksheets were used to help the student with his reading problem.

The second session of the forty minute reading class was used as a reading period. Students read material silently from printed material appropriate for their reading level. The material read was then discussed aloud. Oral reading usually followed discussion of the reading material. Students often read stories aloud taking the parts of the characters. The tape recorder was used almost daily for oral reading.

As the school year drew to a close, the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test," the "Stanford Reading Achievement Test," and the "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory" were administered to the group of forty-six students. This time Form 2 of the "Gates-MacGinitie" was used by the investigator.

"Iowa Basic Skills" scores were obtained from individual cumulative records on file at Westmont Schools.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE COMMUNITY

Westmont is a suburb of Chicago. It has a population of approximately 8,000 people. The town seems to be divided in its interests. People living in one section of town seem to communicate and neighbor only with those residents living in their section.

Most of the people in Westmont work outside the community. The Burlington Railroad runs through Westmont and is used by many of the residents as a means of transportation to their work in the city.

Westmont has its own weekly newspaper, bank and local shopping area. Most of the residents of the town attend the local churches. The citizens seem interested in their schools and are active in school functions.

Westmont has three school districts. Westmont District No. 57 is located in the center of the town. The majority of the families in this district would be classified as middle-class Americans.

CHAPTER IV

REPORT OF DATA

Data were collected on fifteen girls and thirty-one boys in three areas: (1) reading test scores, (2) reading achievement scores, and (3) self-esteem inventories.

Statistical analysis was by comparisons of the test scores given before the small group instruction and again after small group instruction in reading. The mean for both boys and girls was found in each of the three areas.

The greatest difference between pre-post mean scores was found in comprehension gains made on the reading test by boys. This was followed closely by the mean gain made by girls on the comprehension section of the reading test. The smallest difference between pre-post mean scores was shown by girls in the area of self-esteem.

All the pre-post t tests (Table I) in the three areas were significant beyond the .10 level except the self-esteem measure on girls.

The research hypotheses one and three were accepted on the basis that a significant difference existed between the pre-post means of the reading test scores and reading achievement scores. Hypothesis two was rejected in terms of girls and accepted in terms of boys.

TABLE I

MEAN READING, SELF-ESTEEM SCORES, BEFORE AND AFTER SMALL GROUP INSTRUCTION, GRADES 3-5, WESTMONT, ILLINOIS, DISTRICT 57, 1969-1970

	BOYS		GIRLS		TOTAL	
	FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING	FALL	SPRING
Achievement Test Scores						
Vocabulary	26.41	35.45*	25.40	36.40*	26.08	35.76*
Comprehension	27.70	34.83*	29.53	37.00*	28.30	35.54*
Reading Test Scores						
Vocabulary	27.25	36.80*	31.20	38.33*	28.54	37.30*
Comprehension	22.87	35.77*	25.13	37.80*	23.60	36.43*
Self-Esteem Inventory Scores	62.00	65.87*	56.26	56.40	60.13	62.78*

* t test sig. > .10

Boys showed significant growth in self-concept as well as significant reading improvement in all reading areas. Girls showed significant reading growth in all reading areas but no significant change in self-concept. Using the means as a basis of comparison, research hypothesis four was rejected in terms of the girls and accepted in terms of boys. Overall improvement in self-concept was significant.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The hypotheses of this study were (1) to determine whether small group instruction in reading outside the classroom promoted individual reading growth; (2) to determine whether small group instruction in reading outside the classroom led to an improved self-concept; (3) to determine whether small group instruction in reading increased the reading part of an individual's school achievement; and (4) to learn whether there was a relationship between reading growth and an improved self-concept.

The subjects in this study consisted of forty-six boys and girls in the 1969-70 third, fourth, and fifth grade classes of Westmont, Illinois, School District No. 57. Classroom teachers selected these students as the ones in their rooms to be most in need of small group reading instruction. Of the group studied, thirty-one were boys, and fifteen were girls.

In the fall of 1969, the students were given the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test" and the "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory." The investigator placed each student in a small group with other children who had similar reading disabilities. Each group consisted of four to six students

and worked together for forty minutes a day. Various reading comprehension and reading vocabulary activities were carried out by the investigator in the small groups.

In the spring of 1970, the "Gates-MacGinitie Reading Test," the "Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory," and the "Stanford Reading Achievement Test" were administered to the group. "Iowa Basic Skills" scores were obtained from individual cumulative records on file at Westmont Schools.

Statistical analysis was by comparisons of the test scores given before the small group instruction and again after the instruction. The t test was used to decide whether a significant difference existed between means.

I. SUMMARY

The general findings of the research was that small group instruction in reading of forty minutes a day for a six month period was very effective in raising the scores of children on all three instruments used. This was true for both sexes with one exception: there was no significant difference in the self-esteem scores of the girls. All the other test scores showed significant differences beyond the .10 level using the t test, when scores taken before and after the instruction were compared.

II. CONCLUSIONS

Based upon the resulting data from this study, it would appear at this time that much benefit was derived from the investigator's working with small groups of children in the areas of reading vocabulary and reading comprehension. Growth was apparent in all areas with one exception: there was no significant difference in the self-esteem scores of the girls.

The investigator felt the size of the sample in this study should have been larger. This was especially true in the case of the girls in the study. It is difficult to show any significant difference in such a small sample.

All of the students who received small group reading instruction seemed to be happy with the reading classes and were anxious to attend reading classes during the coming year. This was based on daily observation by the investigator.

III. IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING

Small group reading instruction in the elementary school is of great importance. Students in this study received small group instruction for the short period of six months. This was their first experience with this type of reading instruction. The fact that the improvement in

their reading scores was significant should indicate that continued small group instruction should keep their scores nearly constant or lead to continued growth in reading.

A further implication for teaching is to note the self-esteem scores. The investigator believes it is possible to conceive educational goals in the terms of the self-picture and to secure these goals while attaining academic gains in school achievement. This seems especially important in the case of students who are already working below grade level. The self-picture of these students should be of concern to every adult who instructs them.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on experience in developing this study, the investigator would make the following recommendations:

1. That a longitudinal study be made comparing self-esteem inventory scores, reading growth, and achievement scores from year to year. This would determine whether reading growth and self-concept were related through the school years.
2. That a larger sample be used. This sample could be composed of subjects from a number of schools.
3. That a remedial reading teacher be placed in many elementary schools. Educators, when planning programs for students of elementary age, should

be aware of how important small group reading instruction is to their students.

4. That the classroom teacher make use of a self-esteem inventory in his classroom. Such an inventory gives the teacher a view of the child's feelings and needs.

5. That parents be made aware of the value of small group reading instruction. Their support and cooperation can do much to make such a program a success.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

COOPERSMITH SELF-ESTEEM INVENTORY ADMINISTERED TO ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

Please mark each statement in the following way:
If the statement describes how you usually feel, put a check (✓) in the column, "Like Me."
If the statement does not describe how you usually feel, put a check (✓) in the columne, "Unlike Me."
There are no right or wrong answers.

		Like Me	Unlike Me
1.	I spend a lot of time daydreaming.	____	____
2.	I'm pretty sure of myself.	____	____
3.	I often wish I were someone else.	____	____
4.	I'm easy to like.	____	____
5.	My parents and I have a lot of fun together.	____	____
6.	I never worry about anything.	____	____
7.	I find it very hard to talk in front of the class.	____	____
8.	I wish I were younger.	____	____
9.	There are lots of things about myself I'd change if I could.	____	____
10.	I can make up my mind without too much trouble.	____	____
11.	I'm a lot of fun to be with.	____	____
12.	I get upset easily at home.	____	____
13.	I always do the right thing.	____	____
14.	I'm proud of my school work.	____	____
15.	Someone always has to tell me what to do.	____	____

		Like Me	Unlike Me
16.	It takes me a long time to get used to anything new.	____	____
17.	I'm often sorry for the things I do.	____	____
18.	I'm popular with kids my own age.	____	____
19.	My parents usually consider my feelings.	____	____
20.	I'm never unhappy.	____	____
21.	I'm doing the best work that I can.	____	____
22.	I give in very easily.	____	____
23.	I can usually take care of myself.	____	____
24.	I'm pretty happy.	____	____
25.	I would rather play with children younger than me.	____	____
26.	My parents expect too much of me.	____	____
27.	I like everyone I know.	____	____
28.	I like to be called on in class.	____	____
29.	I understand myself.	____	____
30.	It's pretty tough to be me.	____	____
31.	Things are all mixed up in my life.	____	____
32.	Kids usually follow my ideas.	____	____
33.	No one pays much attention to me at home.	____	____
34.	I never get scolded.	____	____
35.	I'm not doing as well in school as I'd like to.	____	____
36.	I can make up my mind and stick to it.	____	____
37.	I really don't like being a boy--girl.	____	____

		Like Me	Unlike Me
38.	I have a low opinion of myself.	____	____
39.	I don't like to be with other people.	____	____
40.	There are many times when I'd like to leave home.	____	____
41.	I'm never shy.	____	____
42.	I often feel upset in school.	____	____
43.	I often feel ashamed of myself.	____	____
44.	I'm not as nice looking as most people.	____	____
45.	If I have something to say, I usually say it.	____	____
46.	Kids pick on me very often.	____	____
47.	My parents understand me.	____	____
48.	I always tell the truth.	____	____
49.	My teacher makes me feel I'm not good enough.	____	____
50.	I don't care what happens to me.	____	____
51.	I'm a failure.	____	____
52.	I get upset easily when I'm scolded.	____	____
53.	Most people are better liked than I am.	____	____
54.	I usually feel as if my parents are pushing me.	____	____
55.	I always know what to say to people.	____	____
56.	I often get discouraged in school.	____	____
57.	Things usually don't bother me.	____	____
58.	I can't be depended upon.	____	____